

Serial Killer: Elderly Victims of Serial Killers

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Abstract

The phenomenon of serial killing although a rare form of homicide, has attracted on increased degree interest in the last decades. Elderly are also victims of serial killers. Although persons aged 60 and older generally experience the lowest rate of killing of any age group. The aim of this study is to illustrate the little known but noteworthy cases concerning the serial killings of elderly that occurred across the world. The Internet (e-media) was the main source of the data and the content has been analyzed. Forty cases of serial killers of elderly were found in INTERNET up to the year 2012. The study shows that nearly half (40%) of the serial killings were occurred in United States of America, only 2.5% elderly victims of serial killings were found in India. Study has shown that female serial killers use less violent methods to kill their victims and the preferred methods are poisoning. Serial killings was largely based on psychological gratification. The hedonistic serial killers seek pleasure and benefits from killing and derives satisfaction from the killing events. The main motives identified in killings were revenge, profit, terror.

Introduction

Historical criminologists have suggested that there may have been serial murders throughout history, but specific cases were not adequately recorded. Thug Behram, a gang leader of the Indian Thuggee cult of assassins has frequently been said world's most prolific serial killer (www.wikipedia-serial-killer). Hickey has pointed the vulnerable group in society at risk from serial killers. Almost all the victims of serial killers have belonged to the same three categories – children, women and the elderly (Hickey, 1991). We can blame to our uncaring society for allowing them to obvious target. Some are vulnerable others are isolated and marginalised. In the case of the increasing numbers of elderly they are seen as a burden of our society.

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The phenomenon of serial killing, although a rare form of homicide, has attracted an increased degree of interest in the last few decades. Juana Barrera 'old lady killer', Harold Shipman 'Dr. Death', John Wayne Glover 'Granny killer', John Floyed Thomas Jr. 'Westside rapist' are a few of the elderly serial killers that have both terrorized and fascinated the public. Serial killers who torture, mutilate, rape their victims attract an inordinate amount of attention from the public and professionals. Serial killing occurs all over the world in many different forms, committed by different type of people. Dr. Harold Shipman labelled serial killers in the history of the world. He is known to have murdered 218 of his own patients, mostly elderly women whom he killed by poisoning them ([www. Wikipedia/Harold_ shipman](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harold_Shipman)).

Definition of Serial Killer

The English term and concept of the serial killer is commonly attributed to former FBI Special Agent Robert Ressler in the 1970s. The concept had been described earlier, e.g. by German police inspector Ernst Gennat coining the same term in 1930. A serial killer is typically defined an individual who has murdered three or more people over a period of more than a month, with down time between the murders, and whose motivation for killing is largely based on psychological gratification([www.wikipedia-serial-killer](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/serial-killer)). In another term" serial killing is a criminal homicide that involves the killing of several victims in three or more separate events" (Schmallegger, F., 2012).

There is no universally accepted definition of serial killing is. Some authors now suggest that a minimum of two victims is serial killing. Egger (1984) stated that serial killing when one or more individuals commit a second murder. However, other authors believe the minimum number of victims should be set at three (Hickey, 1997), four (Fox& Levin, 1998), or even five (Dietz, 1986), though three victims is commonly considered sufficient (Ferguson, White, Cherry, Lorenz, &Bhimani, 2003; Hickey, E., 2002). Holmes & Holmes (1998), state that serial murder may be defined as the unlawful killing of three or more human beings over a period of time.

Typology of serial killer

Holmes and Burger in 1998, developed a taxonomy based on analysis of four hundred cases that had four different types of serial killers differentiated by offender motivation, selection of victim, expected gain, and method of murder. Refining the typology of Holmes and Burger, Fox and Levin offered a three part typology for serial murderers: thrill motivated, mission oriented or expedience directed. Thrill motivated serial killers, the most common type of serial killer, may be either a sexual sadist or a dominance killer. Mission oriented serial killers generally have either a reformist or a visionary orientation. Reformists want to rid the world of evil; visionaries, who are quiet rare and tend to be genuinely psychotic, hear voices commanding them to do certain activities. Expedience directed serial killers are driven by profit or protection. Profit driven killers may kill for financial or material gain, and protection oriented killers commit murder to mask other crimes, such as robbery (Schmallegger, F, 2012). Ressler and others identified two types of serial killer: organized and disorganized. An organized offender posses good intelligence and social and sexual competence, lives with a partner, is likely to be employed, carefully planned crime, and use of a weapon he has brought with him and subsequently removed from the crime scene. A disorganized offender is characterized by average intelligence, and social immaturity, sexual incompetence, lives alone, kills spontaneously, and leaves a haphazard crime scene (Ressler et.al., 1988). In general, there is an indication that there has been an increase in serial killing and this may be attributed to the improvement in communication and computer networks in law enforcement agencies and the fact that they have become better equipped to identify links between victims killed by the same murderer.

Review of Literature

Most of the authors believe the minimum number of victims should be set at three for serial killing (Hickey, 1997; Douglas, Burgess, Burgess& Ressler, 1992; Ferguson, White, Cherry, Lorenz& Bhimani, 2003; Keeney& Heide, 1994). Serial sexual killer involves evidence of sexual activity before, during and or after death (Meloy, 2000). Hickey (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of studies

and found that half of the offenders come from a wide variety of educational and occupational backgrounds. Jeking (1988) concluded that most start their careers between the ages of 24 and 40. The median age of arrested serial murderer is 36 (Bartol, 1995). In a study of 217 American serial murderers, canter et.al. (1996) found that 75% had previous convictions and nearly half had been arrested as juveniles. Hickey (1991) found that 61% of offenders used a combination of methods, included shooting, stabbing, strangulation, and blunt force with instruments and or hands. Kramer, Lord, and Heilbronn (2004) found in their comparative analysis of single and serial homicide that gunshot wounds followed by stab wounds were the most frequently occurring causes of death. Most homicide cases involve people who know each other; serial homicide is typically a stranger to stranger crime (Egger, 1998; Fox & Levin, 1999; Godwin, 2000). Women are rarely known as killers but there have been a considerable number of female serial killer (Egger, 2002; Hickey, 1997). In past many decades, crime and criminals have changed their trends, so researcher tried to examine different aspects of serial killing. Keeping the foregoing view, the present work addresses itself to some objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- 1 To assess the motives behind killing of elderly people.
- 2 To know the ratio between male and female serial killers and compare their killings.
- 3 To examine the killing patterns used by the killers.
- 4 To analyse the circumstances leading to the crime.

Research Methodology

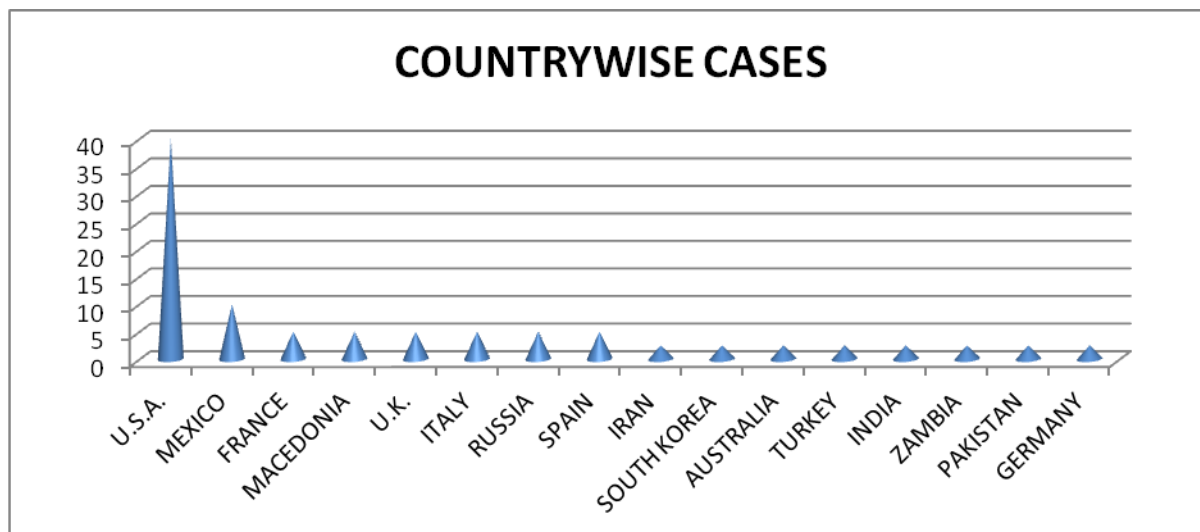
The aim of this study is to illustrate the noteworthy cases concerning the serial killers of elderly people that occurred across the world. In this study the cases of serial killers of elderly people were taken (cases up to December 2012) from INTERNET for the research work. The secondary data was the main source of the study. Out of 388 cases of serial killers, 40 cases of elderly victims have been found. These 40 cases were systematically collected and their content have been analysed. Thus the method of content analysis was used in this study.

Results

Prevalence of serial killing cases

There are varying estimates of the incidence of serial murder. Homes and De Burger (1988) claimed that as 3,500 to 5,000 people are victims of serial murder each year in the U.S. and that serial killers are responsible for up to two- thirds of unsolved homicide as a portion of missing person's cases. Gresswell and Hollin (1994) estimate that in U.K, there are up to four serial killers active at any one time and that between 1982 and 1991 there were 196 victims of multicide in England and Wales. James De Fronzo and his co researchers pointed out that the incidence of male serial killers varies widely among the U.S. states ranging from a high of 18.6 serial killers per 10 million residents in California to a low of 3.4 per 10 million in Pennsylvania.

Country wise cases



Cone diagram shows that 40 cases of serial killing of elderly victims were found across the world. In comparison to other countries, highest number of the cases 40%, were found only in United States of America. In Mexico 10% cases were committed against the elderly victims. Rest of the half cases were found in various countries i.e. France 5%, Macedonia 5%, U.K. 5%, Italy 5%, Russia 5%, Spain 5%, Iran 2.5%, India 2.5%, South Korea 2.5%, Australia 2.5%, Turkey 2.5%, Zambia 2.5%, Pakistan 2.5%, Germany 2.5%.

Offenders' Characteristics

Serial killers span a broad range of human qualities including appearance, social class and intelligence. But most of them are fairly average; contrary to the popular stereotype, serial killers tend in many respects, to be "extraordinarily ordinary" (Levin & Fox, 1985).

Gender of the accused person in each case

In 63.64% of the cases, male offenders were found as serial killers. In 36.36% cases female killers were the accused of serial killing. Although the vast majority of serial killers are male, there have been female serial killers, and the patterns of their activities are sometimes distinct from those of male serial killers (Holmes, S.T., et.al., 1991). Hickey (2002), in a review of basic demographics of serial homicide cases from 1800 to 1995 that included 337 males and 62 females, dispelled the myths that all serial homicide offenders are white, male, insane, very intelligent, travel great distances to commit their crimes (Salfati & Bateman, 2005). Women are rarely viewed by the public as killers; however although it is relatively rare, there have been considerable number of female serial murderer throughout history.

Number of offenders in each case

Except two cases, one offender has been found involved in each case (95.0%) for serial killing. Another two cases, in one case two offenders were involved in other one four offenders were involved in the serial killing.

Offender's age during apprehension

In 32.5% cases, age of the offenders was not found mentioned. Out of 67.5% cases, 60% offenders were apprehended before 60 year of age. Only 7.5% offenders were apprehended, 60 and above age. Total scenario shows the apprehension of the offenders that is 20-29 age group 12.5%, 30-39 age group 20%, 40-49% age group 17.5%, 50-59 age group 10%, 60-69 age group none, 70-79 age group 5%, 80 and above age group 2.5%. Hicky (1991) conducted a meta- analysis of studies concerning 169 America and found that the average age was 28.5. Same in this study, half of the offenders have been found apprehended between the ages of 20 to 49 years.

Span of killing in each case

Some research has looked at the periodicity in an offender's urge or wish to commit murder. In the great majority of cases, intervals between murders in a series range from a few days to a year or even longer. A common pattern has been for a year or more to elapse after the first killing which is followed by three or four further murders in a year (Ferguson, C. J., 2010). In case of span of killing, 20 % of cases have not been found mentioned of period of killing. Out of 80% cases, 57.5% were involved in killing of their victims between 1-6 years, 12.5% offenders were involved between 7-10 years, 10% cases 14 and above 15 years.

Number of victims in each case

Nearly half of the cases (42.5%), offenders had killed up to 5 of the elderly victims. In 25 percent cases, offenders were the accused of 6-10 elderly victims. Rest of the others were accused of 11-15 (8.3%), 16-20 (15%), 21-25 (2.5%), 26-30 (2.5%), 40 and above (5%) serial killing the victims.

Main reasons for killing (Table-1)

REASON	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Economic gain	12	30.0
Valuable things	05	12.5
Revenge on women	04	10.0
To liberate victim soul	01	02.5
Childhood problems	03	07.5
To scare their co-workers	01	02.5
Sexual offender	02	05.0
Prostitute/Homosexual killer	01	02.5
Family problems	01	02.5
History of mental problem	03	07.5
Not Mentioned	07	17.5
Total	40	100.0

Main reasons of killing was found (Table-1) behind the killing, economic gain and valuable things (30.0% and 12.5%) . Revenge on women and childhood problems were also the reason for killing of elderly. In Some cases, mental problem was also noticed for killing.

Ways of killing in each case (Table-2)

WAYS OF KILLING	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Strangulation	08	20.0
Poisoning	07	17.5
Beaten to death	01	02.5
Drug Injection	01	02.5
Dismembered and buried	02	05.0
Head crushed/smothered	05	12.5
Rape and strangulation/suffocation	08	20.0
Throat slitting	01	02.5
Burned the body	01	02.5
Suffocation	01	02.5
Hand cuffed and killed	01	02.5
Bludgeoned to death	02	05.0
Stoned to death	01	02.5
Not Mentioned	01	02.5
Total	40	100.0

Way of killing is an area that has drawn much attention. Hickey (1991) found that 61% of offenders used a combination of methods. The methods used by killers to perpetrate their killings were varied and included shooting, stabbing, strangulation and blunt force with instruments and or hands. Likewise, several healthcare providers used more than one method to kill patients.

In Table-2, strangulation was the most frequent of death (40%), among these 20% elderly women were sexually exploited by the serial killers. While poisoning 17.5%, head crushing 12.5%, bludgeoned to death 5%, dismembered and buried 5% were also found in way of committing crime. Others like beaten to death, injecting drug, throat slitting, body burned, suffocation, hand cuffed and killed, stoned to death were found in ways of killing elderly victims.

Family/ personal problems (Table-3)

PROBLEMS	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Marital problem	01	02.5
Troubled relationship with parents	04	10.0
Mother abusive/ alcoholic/ illicit relations	03	07.5
Scandalized family	01	02.5
Maltreated by father/ grandmother/ aunt	03	07.5
Psychological problem	07	17.5
Criminality insane	04	10.0
Hatred women	01	02.5
Failed in business	01	02.5
Not Mentioned	15	37.5
Total	40	100.0

Table-3 shows that offenders had bitter experiences with their parents and grandparents. Most of the offenders had psychological problems. Some were maltreated by their grandmother in their childhood. Nearly 40% cases were not found mentioned by personnel or family problems. 17.5% cases were pertaining to psychological problems. 25% cases have been found related to the offenders' parents as offenders had problems with their parents.

Offender profession in each case (Table-4)

PROFESSION	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Businessmen	01	02.5
Doctor	02	05.0
Nurse	05	12.5
Working in elderly home	01	02.5
Working as doctor	01	02.5
Professional boxer	01	02.5
Television rigger	01	02.5
Professional wrestler	01	02.5
Air-force worker	01	02.5
Cab driver	01	02.5
Journalist	01	02.5
Not Mentioned	24	60.0
Total	40	100.0

Caretakers, doctors and nurses take advantage of the dependence of their elderly victims by suffocating and poisoning them. Nearly 1/4th of the offenders were found in medical profession (Table-4). Other offenders were engaged in different profession as businessman, boxer, wrestler journalist, driver etc. 60% of the offenders were not mentioned by any profession.

Sentence to the offenders (Table-5)

SENTENCE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Arrested	13	32.5
Imprisonment	04	10
Life imprisonment	11	27.5
Death sentence	08	20.0
Insane asylum	02	05.0
Not Mentioned	02	05.0
Total	40	100.0

Table-5 indicates that highest numbers of offenders (32.5%) were arrested but their punishment was not mentioned. 27.5% offenders were punished by life imprisonment. 20 Percent offenders were given death sentence. Two offenders have been kept in insane asylum due to their mental problems.

Pre-apprehension of offenders

Serial murderers often have extensive records; the records reflect petty theft, embezzlement, and forgery, rather than a history of violence (Jenkins, 1988). In a study of 217 American serial murderers, canter et.al. (1996) found that 75% had previous convictions and nearly half had been arrested in juveniles. Table 12 shows that 25 percent offenders were pre-apprehended by the

police for the different types of crimes whereas 75 percent offenders were apprehended in serial killing.

Discussion

Serial killers are individuals who can be responsible for horrific crimes, while at the same time persons leading quite normal lives, killing produces discomfort, fear and awe in most people. Many serial killers have faced similar problems in their childhood development. Hickey explained how early childhood trauma can set the child up for deviant behaviour in adulthood (Holmes, 2000). Nearly half of the serial killers in the study experienced home environment problems during their childhood such as broken home or the lack of discipline in the home. John Glover, 'The granny killer' was convicted of many petty crimes in his childhood. He had a troubled relationship with older women in his life, especially his mother, who had had several husbands and many boyfriends (www.wikipedia/Jhon_Glover). It was common for the serial killers to come from a family that had experienced divorce, separation, lack of parent. Furthermore nearly half of the serial killers had experienced some type of physical and sexual abuse and even more had emotional neglect by their family members.

The alcoholic or drug addict father or immoral mother facilitates the propensities of criminality. Psychological and behavioural problems such as alcoholism and drug use are common in the killers' families. . Karamarkov was a drug addict and he used the money to buy drugs (www.en.ce.cn). Medical professionals are sometimes referred as 'angles of death'. Medical professionals kill their patients for money, sadistic pleasure, for believe that they are easing the patients pain (Holmes, 1998). Four such killer were known as 'Angels of Death' and these Australian women were nurses, murdered scores of elderly patients. They enjoyed the power of life and death in their hands (www.Lainz_Angels_of_Death).

Female serial killers were found 40% and were tended to murder elderly people for material gain or mental satisfaction. Holmes 1998, the methods female killers use for murder is covert or low profile, such as murder by poisoning. They commit killings in specific places, such as victims' home or a health care centre. A exception to the typical characteristics of female serial killer was Lakshmi "Cyanide Mallika", Indian lady charged with murdering five elderly women for gain. Lakshmi used to befriend well to do devotees frequenting the temples and gain their confidence. She would later mix cyanide in their food and then decamp with their valuables (www.allvoices.com).

The result also reveals that 40% of the cases, where female offenders were found in killing of elderly women. Juana Barraza, 'Silent Lady killer' who was the country's most wanted serial killer sought in the strangling or beating deaths of dozens of elderly women (www.wikipedia/Juana_Barraza). The study shows that in most of the cases, the victims were stranger to the assailant or there were no known connections. In some cases, victims were well-known to the killers as patients. Though the large number of killing were committed in nursing homes and hospitals but lack of evidences criminals were punished for less number of killing. "British doctor, Harold Shipman, who is known to have murdered 218 of his own patients, mostly elderly women whom he killed by poisoning them. This went on for years before he was caught, and the real figure may have been higher-possibly 450 (www.blurtit.com)".

Result also shows that criminals killed alone their victims except in two cases. Lonely victims were targeted for the killing. St. Petersburg serial killer was charged for murdering elderly women all over Florida. These ladies were living alone, that was one of the reasons they were targeted (www.wtsp.com). Hedonistic type of serial killer seeks thrills and derives pleasure from killing. Sex is the primary motive of lust killers. Material gain and comfortable life style are the primary motives of comfort killers. "Thierry Paulin was leading an extravagant life style, spending his nights dancing, drinking champagne and snorting cocaine. In 1984 he murdered eight old women. The violence of the crimes was horrific, some of the victims had their head stuck into plastic bags, some were beaten to death, and one of them was forced to drink drain cleaner. (www.wikipidia/Thierry_Paulin)". Some of the offenders were drug addicts and they used their money to buy drugs. "A Macedonian court sentenced a man to life imprisonment for four murders. All the victims were elderly women. It was claimed that Karamarkov would show up at the victim's door begging for his supposedly ill mother and then hit them on the head before taking their jewellery. Karamarkov was a drug addict and he

used the money to buy drugs (www.en.ce.cn)". A few had high body counts, but most killed fewer than 10 victims. Like anyone, serial killers learnt and gained from experience. "John Floyd Thomas Jr. born in 1936 is an American serial killer convicted of the murders of seven women in the Los Angeles area during the 1970s and 1980s, and suspected by police of 10 to 15 more. Thomas mother died when he was 12 years old. He later alternately raised by his aunt and a godmother. In childhood he was arrested for burglary and attempted rape. In mid 1970s, Thomas entered the homes of elderly women who lived alone, raped them and choked them until they passed out or died. At least 17 were killed and were typically found with pillows or blankets over their faces. A decade later, five elderly women were found raped and killed, also with blankets or pillows over their faces (www.wikipedia/Jhon_Floyd_Thomas)".

The common point concerning the serial killer is the presence of free will. Beccaria is called the father of classical school of criminology. This school is based on hedonistic psychology, which means a man governs his behaviour by consideration of pleasure and pains. A person is assumed to have a free will and to make his choice with reference to the hedonistic calculations (Ponnaian, 1995 a; Schmaller, 2007). Women have been virtually invisible in criminological analysis until recently. The exploitation of women by men triggers women's deviant behaviour, because girl or young women who are sexually or physically exploited may become criminal (Schmallegger, 2012). The victim is killed for the psychological and economic gain on the part of murder. Sigmund Freud has coined the term psychoanalysis is based on an entire theory of human behaviour. From the point of view of psychoanalysis, criminal behaviour is maladaptive, the product of inadequacies inherent in the offender's personality (Schmallegger, 2012; Bartol, 1986; Devasia, 1992). The serial killer can be viewed as an ultimate product of their culture. Sutherland who propounded the differential association theory in which he suggested that human personality and culture are directly related and a person becomes criminal mostly because of the series of chain circumstances in which he is associated or move (Schmallegger, 2012). Serial killers come from all different social classes and geography but come from similar inadequate families. The broken home, has serious impact in the mind of the juvenile on the emotional and socio-economic relationship. The alcoholic or drug addict father, or immoral mother facilitates the propensities of juvenile delinquency. Divorced family also has tremendous influence in the mind of the juvenile for delinquency (Ponnaian, 1995b).

Conclusion

Serial killers often seem normal; they have families and steady jobs. Usually, they come from unstable families. Their families often have criminal, psychiatric and alcoholic histories. They were often emotionally, physically, sexually abused by family members, especially female members. Serial killings also appear to have increased over the past 50 years. Why this happening is a question of some debate. There is no answer, just as there is no simple answer as to why some people become serial killers.

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